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Assistant Commissioner For Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Enclosed for filing is a patent application (specification, claims, Declaration and Power of Attorney)

ENTITLED: **"METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR COMPRESSION AND DECOMPRESSION OF Z DATA"**

INVENTOR(S): Timothy J. Van Hook

This application is a _____ of Application No. _____, filed _____.
A copy of this letter is enclosed for filing in the prior application file.

CALCULATION OF FEES					
ITEM		NUMBER OF CLAIMS FILED MINUS BASE*	NUMBER OF CLAIMS OVER BASE X RATE	\$ AMOUNT	\$ FEE
A	TOTAL CLAIM FEES	16-20* =	0 x \$ 18.00	0	
B	INDEPENDENT CLAIMS FEE**	2-3 =	0 x \$ 78.00	0	
C	SUBTOTAL			SMALL ENTITY FEE = A + B LARGE ENTITY FEE = 2 x (A + B)	0
D	BASIC FEE*			SMALL ENTITY FEE = \$ 345.00 LARGE ENTITY FEE = \$ 690.00	\$690.00
E	MULTIPLE-DEPENDENT CLAIMS FEE			SMALL ENTITY FEE = \$ 130.00 LARGE ENTITY FEE = \$ 260.00	0
F	ASSIGNMENT RECORDING FEE			\$ 40.00	\$40.00
G	TOTAL FEE (ADD LINES C, D, E AND F)				\$730.00
**List Independent Claims: 1 and 9					

This application is incomplete because:

- _____ No filing fee is enclosed. (If no filing fee is enclosed, ignore authorization of the Deposit Account.)
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Also enclosed are:

- ☒ X Check for \$730.00
_____ Small entity claim with a copy of this transmittal letter attached.
_____ A Petition for Extension of Time for the parent application and the required fee.
_____ 5 Sheets(s) of informal drawings, FIGS. 1 to 5. Formal drawings will be sent after Notice of Allowance.
_____ Sheet(s) of formal drawings, FIGS. 1 to _____.
_____ X An Assignment of the invention with the Recordation Form Cover Sheet.
_____ X Other enclosures: Copy of Assignment dated September 1, 2000.

Authorization and Address for Correspondence

- ☒ X The Commissioner is authorized during the prosecution of this application to charge fees that may be required or credit any overpayment of fees to Deposit Account No. 501215, except for payment of patent issue fees required under 37 CFR § 1.18. Please show our above-referenced number with any credit or charge to our Deposit Account. A copy of this letter is enclosed.

Please address all correspondence to J.D. Harriman II, COUDERT BROTHERS, 333 South Hope Street, 23rd Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90071.

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Mary Helen Hoff

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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION
FOR:

**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR
COMPRESSION AND
DECOMPRESSION OF Z DATA**

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BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

5 This invention relates to the field of image data compression.

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2. Background

15 Three dimensional graphics processing applications require the storage and processing of large amounts of data. The time it takes to transfer data from memory to a graphics processor can negatively affect the ability to process graphics data. There is a need to improve the ability to quickly transfer graphics data from memory to processor. This problem can be understood by reviewing the way that graphics systems process data.

20 Computer systems are often used to display generate and display graphics on a display. Display images are made up of thousands of tiny dots, where each dot is one of thousands or millions of colors. These dots are known as picture elements, or “pixels”. Each pixel has a color, with the color of each pixel being represented by a number value stored in the computer system.

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A three dimensional display image, although displayed using a two dimensional array of pixels, may in fact be created by rendering of a plurality of graphical objects.

Examples of graphical objects include points, lines, polygons, and three dimensional solid objects. Points, lines, and polygons represent rendering “primitives” which are the basis for most rendering instructions. More complex structures, such as three dimensional objects, are formed from a combination or mesh of such primitives. To display a particular scene, the visible primitives associated with the scene are drawn individually by determining those pixels that fall within the edges of the primitive, and obtaining the attributes of the primitive that correspond to each of those pixels. The obtained attributes are used to determine the displayed color values of applicable pixels.

Sometimes, a three dimensional display image is formed from overlapping primitives or surfaces. A blending function based on an opacity value associated with each pixel of each primitive is used to blend the colors of overlapping surfaces or layers when the top surface is not completely opaque. The final displayed color of an individual pixel may thus be a blend of colors from multiple surfaces or layers.

In some cases, graphical data is rendered by executing instructions from an application that is drawing data to a display. During image rendering, three dimensional data is processed into a two dimensional image suitable for display. The three dimensional image data represents attributes such as color, opacity, texture, depth, and perspective information. The draw commands from a program drawing to the display

may include, for example, X and Y coordinates for the vertices of the primitive, as well as some attribute parameters for the primitive (color and depth or “Z” data), and a drawing command. The execution of drawing commands to generate a display image is known as graphics processing.

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A limitation of system performance the bandwidth required to transfer data from memory to the graphics processor. Prior art systems do not provide a way to optimize data transfer in a graphics processing system.

LA 29511v3

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a scheme for compressing the depth, or Z, components of image data. The data is grouped into a plurality of tiles. A test is performed to determine if a tile can be compressed so that its size after compression is less than its size before compression. If so, the tile is compressed. A tile table includes a flag that can be set for each tile that is compressed. In a data transfer from memory to a graphics processor, the tile table is examined to identify those tiles that are compressed and must be decompressed prior to use.

In one scheme the number of primitives that are contained in a tile are determined. If the number of primitives is less than one third of the number of pixels in a tile, an assumption is made that the tile can be compressed. For example, for an 8x8 tile, if the number of primitives is equal to or less than 21, the tile is compressed. In one embodiment, the compression scheme comprises storing a plane equation for each primitive and storing the fragment ID (FID) for each pixel in a primitive.

In another embodiment, a number of compression schemes are available for use on a tile and the best compression scheme is chosen on a tile by tile basis. The invention includes an identifying code for each compression scheme which is accessed on decompression so that the correct decompression scheme is used.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a flow diagram illustrating the compression of tiles and updating of the TFT in the present invention.

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Figure 2 is a flow diagram illustrating the reading of a tile from memory and the writing back of a tile to memory.

Figure 3 is a block diagram of the present invention.

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Figure 4 is a flow diagram illustrating the examination of a tile for possible compression.

Figure 5 illustrates possible pixel configurations.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

A method and apparatus for compression of Z image data is described. In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a more detailed description of the invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well known details have not been provided so as to not unnecessarily obscure the invention.

The present invention provides for a compression scheme to reduce the amount of data that needs to be stored in memory. The compressed data can be transferred from memory to processor at a higher bandwidth than uncompressed data, improving performance. The invention also provides for a method of decompressing the data at the processor. The compression scheme of the invention is a lossless scheme so that no image information is lost. The invention operates under the constraints that the compressed image data is less than or equal to the image data uncompressed, and that the bandwidth of transferring the compressed image data is less than or equal to the bandwidth of the uncompressed image data.

Data Organization

The invention organizes color images in 2 dimensional groups of pixels referred to as tiles. In one embodiment, the tiles are 8 pixel by 8 pixel tiles. Other configurations of tiles can be used without departing from the scope and spirit of the present invention.

Tile Compression

The present invention considers each tile to be written to memory as a candidate for compression. The invention determines whether the compression of the tile would save memory or not and processes the tile accordingly. As a result, each individual tile could be compressed or uncompressed. (The compression status of each tile could be stored in the tile itself. However, an uncompressed tile has no available space to indicate its status as an uncompressed tile. In addition, at least the first word of each tile would need to be read to determine if it is compressed or not, reducing memory efficiency because reading the first word of a tile before making a decision about how many memory words to read would make typical pipelined memory access difficult). To avoid these problems, the present invention includes a means of tracking the compression status of each tile via a Tile Format Table (TFT). The TFT includes an entry for each tile in the table. When the tile is written to memory, its corresponding TFT entry is updated to indicate whether it is compressed or not.

A flow diagram of the compression of tiles and updating of the TFT in the present invention is illustrated in Figure 1. At step 101 the graphics processor gets the next tile to be written to memory. At step 102 it is determined if after compression the compressed tile will be less than or equal to the uncompressed tile (i.e. the original tile). If not, the tile remains uncompressed at step 103. If the compressed tile would be less than or equal to the uncompressed tile the tile is compressed at step 104. After either step 103 or 104, the tile is written to memory at step 105. At step 106, the appropriate entry in

the TFT is updated to indicate the compressed/uncompressed status of the tile. The system then returns to step 101.

A tile is decompressed into Z pixel data when the tile is read from memory for graphics processing and is compressed when written back to memory. Figure 2 is a flow diagram illustrating the reading of a tile from memory and the writing back of a tile to memory. At step 201 the tile is accessed from memory. At step 202 the TFT entry for that tile is examined. At step 203 it is determined if the TFT entry indicates a compressed tile. If so, the tile is fetched and decompressed at step 204. If not, the tile is simply fetched at step 205. After either step 204 or 205, the tile is used by the graphics processor at step 206. When writing a tile back to memory, the TFT is again checked at step 207 to see if the tile was a compressed tile. If so, the tile is compressed at step 208. After step 208, or if the tile was not a compressed tile, it is written back to memory at step 209.

TFT Structure

The present invention contemplates the ability to apply different compression schemes to each tile, and for each tile to be compressed to a different number of words. For example, if an uncompressed pixel tile contains 4 memory words, then a compressed tile could be one, two, or three words in length. Correspondingly, the TFT contains a value 1 to 4 for each tile describing the number of words containing the compressed tile

(1 to 3 words) or the uncompressed pixel tile (4 words if the tile cannot be compressed into fewer than 4 words).

Other system elements, such as a CPU or I/O controller, which access the
5 compressed images generated by the graphics processor, need to perform decompression and optionally compression. This means that the TFT is a shared system resource. The TFT can act as a shared resource by being multibuffered much like color images are multibuffered, that is, one copy of the TFT accessed by the graphics processor during rendering one image, and another copy of the TFT accessed by other system elements for
10 another image.

Because the number of tiles in a typical image can be large, such as 32K 8x8 tiles in a 2M pixel image, even with only a few compression states stored in the TFT, such as 4 states of valid, 1 or 2 word compressed, uncompressed, in 2 bits per entry, the TFT
15 memory can be significant, (as much as 4K bytes). The TFT itself can be be cached in the graphics processor and maintained in memory to reduce on chip TFT storage. In this case a graphics memory access can update the TFT cache entry from the memory TFT if the tile entry it requires is not in the cache. Updating the TFT cache can be pipelined with graphics processor compression and decompression in conjunction with pipelined
20 memory access. Typically the TFT cache entries are updated on memory read and therefore available for the later memory write of the same tiles. A memory TFT with graphics processor cache also simplifies providing access to the TFT by other system elements, insofar as the memory TFT is accessible by other system elements.

Tile Caching

In a typical implementation, the graphics processor anticipates image tiles that it will process, reads memory words in advance of processing (prefetch), and buffers memory tiles it has completed processing in advance of writing memory words. This pipelining of memory reads, graphics processing, and memory writes allows enough computing time to perform compression and decompression in parallel with processing. One implementation of pipelined memory access and graphics processing is an image cache, in which tiles are cache lines which are read from memory on cache line misses and written to memory on cache line evictions.

Z Compression

The present invention presumes that Z data is stored in a Zbuffer memory. Each tile in the Zbuffer memory can be read out or written as pixels, or in any one of a number of compressed formats (requiring fewer memory words to be accessed). The Z compression scheme of the present invention in one embodiment does not reduce the size of the Zbuffer, only the number of words transferred per Z tile. Compressed tiles reduce Z memory bandwidth in order to make more bandwidth available for other accesses, such as color and display, and thereby increase system throughput.

Simulation results for a software implementation show the following compressed bandwidth as a percentage of transferring uncompressed data (referred to hereas Z pixel bandwidth). Assume a data set that is a torus of around 28K triangles whose average front facing triangle size is indicated. (Only rendered Z tile bandwidth is measured, not background Z tiles which are not modified). For 16b Z values and 16b Z compression.

average triangle size	compressed bandwidth
100 pixel	37%
50 pixel	49%
25 pixel	68%

The advantage of the invention is that bandwidth improvement for existing applications is acheived and performance is never worse than an uncompressed Zbuffer. Furthermore, there is a synergy between compressed Z and Z caches in that areas of high geometric complexity (small polygons) benefit from the multiple hit write combining performance of the Z cache even if tiles don't compress, and areas of low geometric complexity (big polygons) compress well even if cache line pixels are only written once per miss and eviction. Because the compression is based on pixel masks, functions like alpha threshholding and virtual intersections can also be compressed. A secondary advantage of Z compression is that translucent pixels that test but don't update Z do not decrease the amount of Z compression, so effects like particles, smoke, shadows, weapons flares, etc. which blend on top of opaque Z buffers can have unlimited geometric pixel complexity without increasing Z bandwidth.

Block Diagram

A block diagram of the present invention is illustrated in Figure 3. This embodiment of the invention presumes that the Z tiles are cached. Z tiles in the Z buffer are either compressed or decompressed, but the Z tiles in the cache are all decompressed. Bandwidth savings occur in the transfer of compressed tiles between the cache and the buffer. Compressed tiles that are received from the buffer to the cache are decompressed before writing to the cache. (This transfer only occurs on a cache miss and when the transferred tile was already compressed. Uncompressed tiles from the buffer are simply written through to the cache.) Z tiles that are evicted from the cache and written back to the buffer are compressed (when appropriate) before being transferred to the buffer.

Referring to Figure 3, Z pixel data 301 is provided to the Zbuffer datapath 303 along with Z pixel address data 302. Z pixel address data is also provided to Z tags 305. The Z buffer datapath communicates the Z pixel data 301 and Z pixel address data 302 to the Z cache 304 which stores Z pixels and additional data referred to as FID (fragment ID). The FID is the count of all triangles which write the tile. The FID is used to reconstruct the plane equation from pixels from the same triangle.

Z addresses are checked to see if the tile resides in the cache. If so, the system can use the resident Z tile. If the Z tile is a “miss”, i.e. it is not in the cache, it must be obtained from the Z buffer 310. When that occurs, memory controller 309 retrieves the desired tile from Z buffer 310 and provides it to the Z cache 304 via Miss/Decompress

block 308. The TFT entry for the missed tile is checked and if necessary (meaning if the tile is already compressed), the tile is decompressed and provided to the Z cache 304. Z TFT memory 306 communicates with the Z tags block 305. The Z tags block 305 is used to check for cache hits and misses as described in pending patent application entitled
5 _____ . In the present invention, the tags include a fragment count (FCNT) for each cache line, used to generate the FID per pixel.

The Z TFT 306 contains the status of every tile in the memory Z buffer. The TFT
306 is read during a cache miss to determine if the line is compressed or not, how many
10 memory words to read, and if and how to decompress the tile. The TFT 306 can also contain a Background format per tile, so that for Z buffer clear only the TFT and not the memory needs to be initialized.

The TFT 306 is written by the evict/ compress block 307 after a tile is evicted
15 from cache, based on if and how the tile is compressed. The evict/compress block 307 gets the tile being evicted from cache 304 and tries to compress it based on the pixel FIDs and the Z values. Tiles which can't be compressed are simply written to memory as pixel tiles. The miss/decompress block 308 writes missed tiles into cache, writing the Z values and FIDs, and decompresses compressed tiles or simply writes pixel tiles to cache. The
20 TFT entry 306 for the tile is updated as to whether the tile is compressed or not.

The present invention provides for increased or faster bandwidth on transfers of Z data between the Z cache and the Z buffer. This improved transfer capability improves overall performance of the graphics system.

5 Zbuffering

When a line is written into the cache on a miss, the tag status FCNT in block 305 is set to the number of fragments in a compressed tile, or zero for a pixel (uncompressed) tile (if pixel format cache lines support the FCNT). The FID of each pixel in the cache
10 tile is set to the fragment number which created it for a compressed tile, or FIDMAX for a pixel tile. FIDMAX is a particular FCNT (e.g. 15 for a 4b FCNT and FID) which indicates that more fragments have written the tile than can be counted, and compression cannot be performed, since the FIDs may no longer be unique per fragment. For background tile misses, the pixel FIDs are set to zero, the FCNT to 0, and the Z pixels are
15 written with the background Z value.

The first pixel for a primitive for a tile which writes Z increments the tag status FCNT for that tile, and each pixel in the primitive that writes Z writes the incremented FCNT into the pixel FID. This method implies that each cache tile is visited once per
20 primitive, that is, all the pixels of a primitive for a tile arrive before pixels of any other tile. This may be done by rasterizing in 8x8 tiles.

The FCNT is larger (maximum 15 fragments) than can be compressed (maximum of 6 to 8 fragments) because it is common that more fragments will be written to a tile than are visible, for example, a new primitive overwrites all the pixels of a previous primitive in the tile. The Zbuffer path never sees the entire tile at one time, so there must be extra FIDs for the new pixels so that the evict/compress path 307 can find the actual fragments in the tile later.

FID and FCNT Logic

If miss

if pixel tile, FCNT = 0, FID = FIDMAX (no fids in the tile)

if compressed tile, FCNT = fragment count, FID = pixel mask fid

if background tile, FCNT = 0, FID = 0 (one fragment of background Z)

If hit

If new primitive and first Z write and FCNT < FIDMAX, FCNT++

If Z write, FID = FCNT

(A further constraint on the rasterizer which generates Z values is that the dxz and dyz terms used to generate pixel Z values within a tile should be the same precision as the compressed Z plane equation terms, in order to insure lossless compression).

Tile Format Table

The TFT contains an entry for each tile in the memory Zbuffer. For 8x8 tiles in a 2M pixel Zbuffer, this is 32K entries. Each entry is a 2 bit value encoded as

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00 background tile

01 pixel tile

10 compressed 1 word

11 compressed 2 words

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The results in a 64K bit or 8KB table. A maximum 1280 image could reduce it to 5KB. (Note that more than 2 compression formats, such as for 24 or 32b Z buffering, where more memory words are needed to store an uncompressed Z tile, would require more bits or elimination of the background format).

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The TFT is read on a miss to figure out how many words to read from memory (0,1,2,4) and whether to decompress the tile. The compression format has to stay in the miss queue for the miss/decompress path 308 to use when the memory word(s) eventually show up.

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The TFT 306 is written by the evict/compress path 307 once it has processed a tile. (Note the TFT 306 could itself be a cache).

Compressed formats

The compressed tile formats contain the plane equation of each fragment generated from pixel differences in the tile, and a pixel mask of the FID of each pixel generated from the cache pixel FID 304. The pixel location of the pz term is implicit, being the first (such as upper left) pixel of its fragment in the tile. All other pixels in that fragment are generated by their offset times dxz dyz from the first pixel. This means no additional information besides the plane equations and FID masks are needed.

Some compressed formats for 8x8 so far are as follows:

16b Z format

16b pz, dxz, dyz or 6B per plane equation per fragment

32B, 3 fragment plus 14B mask, encoded 7b per 4 pixels of 3 fids

64B, 6 fragment plus 24B mask of 3 bits fid per pixel

(128B, 64 16b pixels)

24-32b Z format

24 or 32b pz, dxz, dyz or 9 or 12B per plane equation per fragment

32B, 2 fragments plus 8B mask of 1 bit fid per pixel

64B, 4 fragments plus 16B mask of 2 bit fids per pixel

96B, 6 fragments plus 24B mask of 3 bit fids per pixel (8 frags if 24b)

plus 32B stencil of 64 8b pixels if needed

(256B, 64 32b pixels, or possibly 192B of 24b pixels)

Note that the maximum number of compressed fragments determines the size of the compress and decompress paths. Fewer fragment formats than the maximum are essentially free since they reuse the maximum fragment paths.

Compression Path

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Compression occurs in the evict write path 307 from the cache 304 into memory 310. After the tile is processed, the compression path updates the TFT 306 with the status of the tile.

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The plane equation of each fragment is computed by subtracting Z values in X and Y of pixels of the same FID. (Note, in one embodiment only pixels whose tile coordinates differ in X and Y by 1, 2, or 4 are candidates for Z subtraction, because differences of 3,5,6, or 7 would require a division instead of a shift to get the dxz and dyz terms, which is expensive and can introduce truncation error.)

15

Compression can fail (be unwarranted or not satisfy the constraints noted above) for several reasons. Compression failures include more fragments than can fit in a compressed format, any pixel whose FID is FIDMAX, which means that FCNT has overflowed and pixels may not be unique to a fragment, or if plane equation terms cannot be computed as discussed below. If compression fails (i.e. is not practical), the tile is written to memory as a pixel tile.

Figure 4 is a flow diagram illustrating the examination of a tile for possible compression. At step 401 the number of fragments in the tile is determined and the FID for the tile is generated. At step 402 it is determined if the number of fragments is greater than or equal to one third the number of pixels in the tile. If the number of fragments is greater than or equal to the number of pixels, compression is presumed to not be efficient and the tile is sent as pixels at step 403. The FID is also checked to see if it is equal to FMAX at step 404. If it is equal, the tile cannot be compressed and the tile is sent as pixels at step 403. Otherwise the tile is compressed at step 405.

If all pixels of each fragment had a pair of adjacent pixels in X and a pair of adjacent pixels in Y, computing the plane equation fragment would be straightforward, with pseudo code such as:

```
for each pixel in the tile at this FID
  if first pixel store PZ
  if adjacent pair in X, subtract and store into DXZ
  if adjacent pair in Y, subtract and store into DYZ
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The FID mask for the tile is examined to find the first pixel and the adjacent pairs. This condition is true for many fragments, however as geometric complexity increases, this condition is often not true.

For example, Figure 5 illustrates some possible pixel configurations. Some pixels are found in X,Y pairs such as pairs 501 or as single pixels 502. The pixels may also be

in single rows in X 503 or Y 504. There may be an X pair with diagonal Y 508 or Y pair with diagonal X 506. There could be a diagonal 507 or 2 pixels separated 505. There could also be an X pair with separated Y 509, a Y pair with separated X 510, or more than two pixels separated 511. Some examples of fragment pixel plane equation configurations, and their occurrence as a percentage of total fragments in a simulation of average 25 pixel triangles in an 8K triangle torus follows.

67% adjacent xy pairs 501.

15% single pixel 502: dxz and dyz are can be zero.

13% single row 503 or column 504: dxz or dyz can be zero.

2% adjacent x or y pair and diagonal (506, 508), can generate dx or dy

2% diagonal 507: diagonal delta (dxyz) can be used for dxz, and dyz can be zero.

1% 2 pixels separated 505 by X or Y 1,2,4

0.5% adjacent x or y pair (509 or 510), first and another pixel separated by x or y

1,2,4

? adjacent x or y pair, two pixels separated by x or y 1,2,4 (not implemented)

? more than 2 pixels separated 511 by x or y 1,2,4 (not implemented)

Since more complex configurations of fragments usually have few pixels, they tend to occur in tiles with a many fragments. A useful measure is how many tiles which were compressed included these configurations, that is, what percentage of compressed tiles would have failed without these configurations, again with the same average 25 pixel 8K triangle torus.

41% single pixel 502

35% single row 503 or column 504

6% adjacent x or y pair and diagonal (506, 508)

5 3% diagonal 507

1% 2 pixels separated 505

0.5% adjacent x or y pair, first and another pixel separated 509, 510

2% other configurations (not compressed)

10 The 2% other configurations are multiple separated pixels 511 and pixels

separated by 3,5,6,7 for which lossless plane equations cannot be easily generated and compression fails. In this simulation 68% of the tiles compress, 30% have too many fragments to compress, and the remaining 2% are the other configurations.

15 The fragment pixels separated by more than 1 pixel usually occur from sliver triangles (triangles thinner than a pixel) which only intermittently include a pixel center.

To compress fragments with separated pixels, a larger window in the FID mask must be examined. The size window in which the FID mask is examined adds to complexity and latency. For example, looking for pairs of pixels separated by 1 pixel needs a smaller window, and can be more easily pipelined, than looking for pairs of pixels separated by 2 or 4. It appears that the 2 or 4 separated cases are rare enough to be not worth the complexity, although this might change with more simulation. There is a

typical balance, however, that as more sliver triangles touch a tile, the fragment count also typically increases to where the tile could not be compressed anyway. Effects like textured alpha thresholding (screen door transparency) would increase the likelihood of separated pixels in fragments.

5

If the cache output rate is 8 16b pixel Zs and 8 pixel FIDs, then reading an 8x8 tile from cache takes 8 clocks. Compression could have throughput of 8 clocks, consisting of a number of stages equal to the maximum compressed fragments, for example 6 stages. Each stage would examine the input FID mask and acquire the first occurrence of an FID, and pass on a valid mask of the pixels not matching that FID.

10

The valid mask is a single bit per pixel. If the valid masks contain valid pixels after the last stage, the maximum fragment count has overflowed and the tile can't be compressed. Each stage also keeps a bit mask of pixels which match its FID in order to detect pairs of pixels for plane equation differences. Each stage also updates an output FID mask, consisting of the pixels the stage matched, and whose new FID is the number of the stage (0 to 5). This remaps fragment FIDs into the minimum number of fragments in the tile, since some fragments may have been completely overwritten during Z buffering.

15

20

Each stage also examines the input bit mask for pairs of pixels which match its FID in X, Y, or diagonally. Each stage stores up to 5 Z values, consisting of the first Z pixel (pz of the plane equation), X left, X right, Y top, and Y bottom. Diagonally pairs

can write the X or Y pairs if X or Y pairs have not been written, and then be overwritten by later X or Y pairs. Since pairs of pixels often cross 8 pixel cache words, it seems better to examine the bit masks 3 or 4 clocks ahead of selecting Z pixels, by pipelining the Z data for 3 or 4 clocks behind the mask processing, than to need to select Z values at each stage from multiple cache words. Most likely the 8 pixel cache words are organized as 4x2 pixels (2 2x2 quads). This means that keeping 4 bitmasks allows the encoding of pixel pairs in the current bit mask or in the last row or column of the previous three bitmasks. Pixel pairs that are detected in the bit masks are used to select and store the incoming Z pixels in the XL,XR,YU,YB registers for later subtraction to generate dxz and dyz. The first 3 mask cycles can simply have bitmasks of zero for the nonexistent previous masks. Detecting pixel pairs separated by 2 would increase previous row and column mask window by 1, and detecting separations of 4 would increase by 3.

Each stage also maintains various pixel counts, in order to detect single pixels, single rows or columns, or single diagonals. These counts can be 2 bits since only 0, 1, 2 or many needed to be counted. Diagonal detection can be relative to the base pixel coordinate, in that all pixels in subsequent rows must be at the pz X coordinate + or the row offset.

After all the tile data has passed a stage, the plane equation can be generated from the fragment by subtracting X pairs and Y pairs (or the various special cases). A stage then decides if the pixel configuration of its FID can generate the appropriate plane equation terms. If not, the tile cannot be compressed. With a maximum of 8 or less

fragments and a cache tile read rate of 8 clocks, the plane equation term subtraction can occur for 1 fragment in 1 clock, and be then pipelined for all the fragments.

The latency through the compression path might be on the order of

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4 clocks for 4 masks to start first stage

8 clocks for data past the first stage

6 clocks for data past the last stage

2 clocks for final output decisions

10

20 clocks total latency per tile

while throughput is sustained at the 8 clock per tile cache data rate. In order to keep the memory occupied during eviction, at least 3 tiles (20 clocks of latency at 8 clocks per tile) should be in the evict path to be ready to write memory. The evicted pixel tile is buffered in a FIFO during compression, and when compression fails the pixel data is written to memory instead of the compressed tile data.

15

The control logic for compression might look something like the following pseudocode. The first stage sees a validmask all valid, and so always sets its stage_fid to the first pixel inputFID.

20

If !stage_active

priority encode first inputFID not FIDMAX at validmask bit

stageFID = first valid FID

stage_active = true

pz = z at first valid FID pixel, when the Z data word comes along

bitmask = 1 if inputFID == stageFID, else 0

5 validmask &= ~bitmask

outputFID = outputFID & ~bitmask | stage_number & bitmask

The X and Y values are captured like

for most recent 4 bitmasks (current, last row, last col, last pixel)

priority encode location first pair of X pixels

10 priority encode location of first pair of Y pixels

priority encode location of first pair of diagonal pixels

if X pair inactive and X pair

select XL, XR when Z data word(s) comes along

set X pair active

15 if Y pair inactive and Y pair

select YU, YD when Z data word(s) comes along

set X pair active

if X pair inactive and diag pair

select XL, XR when Z data word(s) comes along

20 set diag pair active

if Y pair inactive and diag pair

select YU, YD when Z data word(s) comes along

set diag pair active

The various configurations are tracked along the lines of

for each bit in the bitmask, inc pixel count (up to >2)

5 for each row in the bitmask, inc row count (up to >1)

for each col in the bitmask, inc col count (up to >1)

need to keep track of at least 1 previous column X coord and compare

if any bitmask pixel not on the pz pixel diagonal, diag = FALSE

10 The plane equation is generated for a fragment:

If Xpair and Ypair subtract those

If pixelcount == 1 dxz, dyz zeroed

If rowcount == 1 and Xpair, subtract XLXR and zero dyz

15 If colcount == 1 and Ypair, subtract YUYD and zero dxz

If diag and Dpair, subtract XLXR and zero dyz

If Xpair and Dpair, subtract XLXR, subtract YUYD dxz

If Ypair and Dpair, subtract YUYD, subtract XLXR dyz

(need to keep the X direction of the diagonal for the X subtract)

20 If other more complicated configurations...

else compress = FALSE

The final output logic looks at

If any stage active and !compress, then output pixel tile

If validmask not all invalid, pixel tile (includes FIDMAX FIDs)

else compression format is count of active stages up to 3 or 6 or max frags

5 If format is 3 fragment 16b Z, encode mask FID to 7b per 4 pixels.

Update TFT tile with output format

Decompression Path

10 Decompression occurs in the miss decompression path 308 from memory (Z
buffer 310) into the cache (304). The TFT 306 entry for the memory tile tells the
decompression path what to do with the tile.

15 For each pixel Z in each tile, the plane equation terms of the fragment specified in
the mask of that pixel are added to produce the Z value. The first pixel for each fragment
in the tile is the base pixel, whose coordinates within the tile are retained in order to
generate the distance in X and Y to each pixel of that fragment in the tile, and that
distance is multiplied by the plane equation dxz and dyz coefficients to generate the Z
value for that pixel. In addition, the pixel FID in the tile is written to the FID of the pixel
20 in the cache. In pseudo code

Decode 7b/4pixel/3frag/16bZ mask if needed.

For each FID in the tile

If first pixel of that FID then BX, BY = base tile coordinate

For each pixel of that FID, PX, PY = pixel tile coordinate

CacheZ = PZ[FID] + DXZ[FID] * (BXPX) + DYZ[FID] * (BYPY)

CacheFID = FID

TagFCNT = maximum FID in the tile

5

For 16b Z values and a 128B cache Z word, 8 Z pixels are decompressed per clock. For compressed tiles with a maximum of 6 fragments, each pixel selects 1 set of plane equation terms out of six, and one set of base tile coordinates.

10

The entire compressed tile needs to be available before decompression can begin, since one of the first 8 pixels can come from any of the fragment plane equations. Since tiles are 8x8, tile coordinates are 3 bit numbers, so the multiplies can be implemented with 3 adders which shift delta terms by 0,1,2.

15

The tile FIDs should be compared to find the maximum FID to update the tag FCNT, because a tile will often contain fewer fragments than the maximum of that compressed format. The compression path generates FIDs consecutively from 0 for each fragment.

20

Related schemes for compressing Z information are found in co-pending patent applications (assigned to the assignee of the present invention) 1) Method and Apparatus for Controlling Compressed Z information in a Video Graphics System filed August 6, 1999, serial number 09/369,730; 2) Method and Apparatus for Compressing Parameter

CLAIMS OF THE INVENTION

I claim:

1. A method of compressing data in a graphics processing system

5 comprising:

defining a plurality of tiles of data;

defining a tile format table containing a status entry for each of said plurality of tiles;

identifying the number of primitives contained in a tile;

compressing said tile when said compressed tile is smaller than said tile;

10 setting said status entry for said compressed tile in said tile format table;

storing said compressed tile in a memory.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein a tile is compressed when said tile has a number of primitives less than or equal to $1/3$ of the number of pixels in said tile.

15

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said compression is lossless.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein each of said tiles comprises a cache line.

20

5. The method of claim 4 wherein said pixels represent Z data.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein said compression comprises storing a plane equation for each primitive, each primitive having a fragment ID number, and storing the fragment ID for each pixel in each primitive.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the plane equation of pixels in the group is computed by subtracting Z pixels in the group that have the same fragment ID number from the Z value of the first pixel in the group of that fragment ID number.

5

8. The method of claim 2 wherein tiles read from said memory are decompressed when said status bit indicates that said tile is a compressed tile.

9. A graphics processing system comprising:

10 a first memory for storing a plurality of tiles of data;
a second memory for storing a tile format table containing a status entry for each of said plurality of tiles;
a compression system coupled to said first and second memories for compressing said tile when said compressed tile is smaller than said tile, for setting said status entry for said
15 compressed tile in said tile format table, and for storing said compressed tile in a memory.

10. The graphics processing system of claim 9 wherein a tile is compressed when said tile has a number of primitives less than or equal to $1/3$ of the number of pixels
20 in said tile.

11. The graphics processing system of claim 9 wherein said compression is lossless.

12. The graphics processing system of claim 9 wherein each of said tiles comprises a cache line.

5 13. The graphics processing system of claim 12 wherein said pixels represent Z data.

10 14. The graphics processing system of claim 13 wherein said compression comprises storing a plane equation for each primitive, each primitive having a fragment ID number, and storing the fragment ID for each pixel in each primitive.

15 15. The graphics processing system of claim 14 wherein the plane equation of pixels in the group is computed by subtracting Z pixels in the group that have the same fragment ID number from the Z value of the first pixel in the group of that fragment ID number.

16. The graphics processing system of claim 11 wherein tiles read from said memory are decompressed when said status bit indicates that said tile is a compressed tile.

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR COMPRESSION AND
DECOMPRESSION OF Z DATA
ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

5 The present invention provides a scheme for compressing the depth, or Z,
components of image data. The data is grouped into a plurality of tiles. A test is
performed to determine if a tile can be compressed so that its size after compression is
less than its size before compression. If so, the tile is compressed. A tile table includes a
flag that can be set for each tile that is compressed. In a data transfer from memory to a
10 graphics processor, the tile table is examined to identify those tiles that are compressed
and must be decompressed prior to use. In one scheme the number of primitives that are
contained in a tile are determined. If the number of primitives is less than one third of the
number of pixels in a tile, an assumption is made that the tile can be compressed. For
example, for an 8x8 tile, if the number of primitives is equal to or less than 21, the tile is
15 compressed. In one embodiment, the compression scheme comprises storing a plane
equation for each primitive and storing the fragment ID (FID) for each pixel in a
primitive.

FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating a process for handling tiles. The process begins with a decision diamond 102 asking "COMPRESSED LTE UNCOMPRESSED?". If the answer is "YES", the process proceeds to block 104 "COMPRESS TILE", then to block 105 "WRITE TO MEMORY", and finally to block 106 "UPDATE TFT". If the answer to 102 is "NO", the process proceeds to block 103 "DON'T COMPRESS TILE", then to block 105 "WRITE TO MEMORY", and finally to block 106 "UPDATE TFT". After block 106, the process loops back to block 101 "GET NEXT TILE".

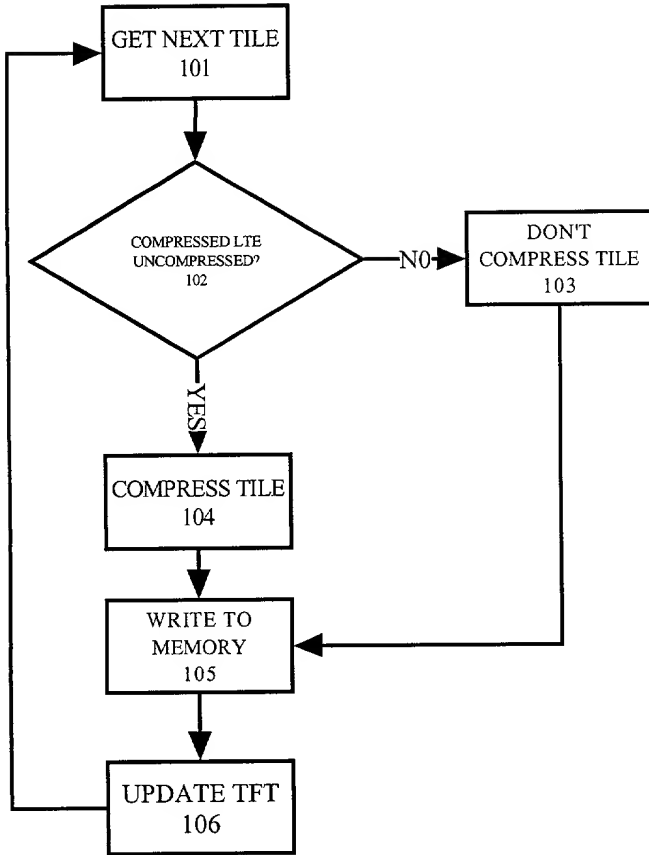
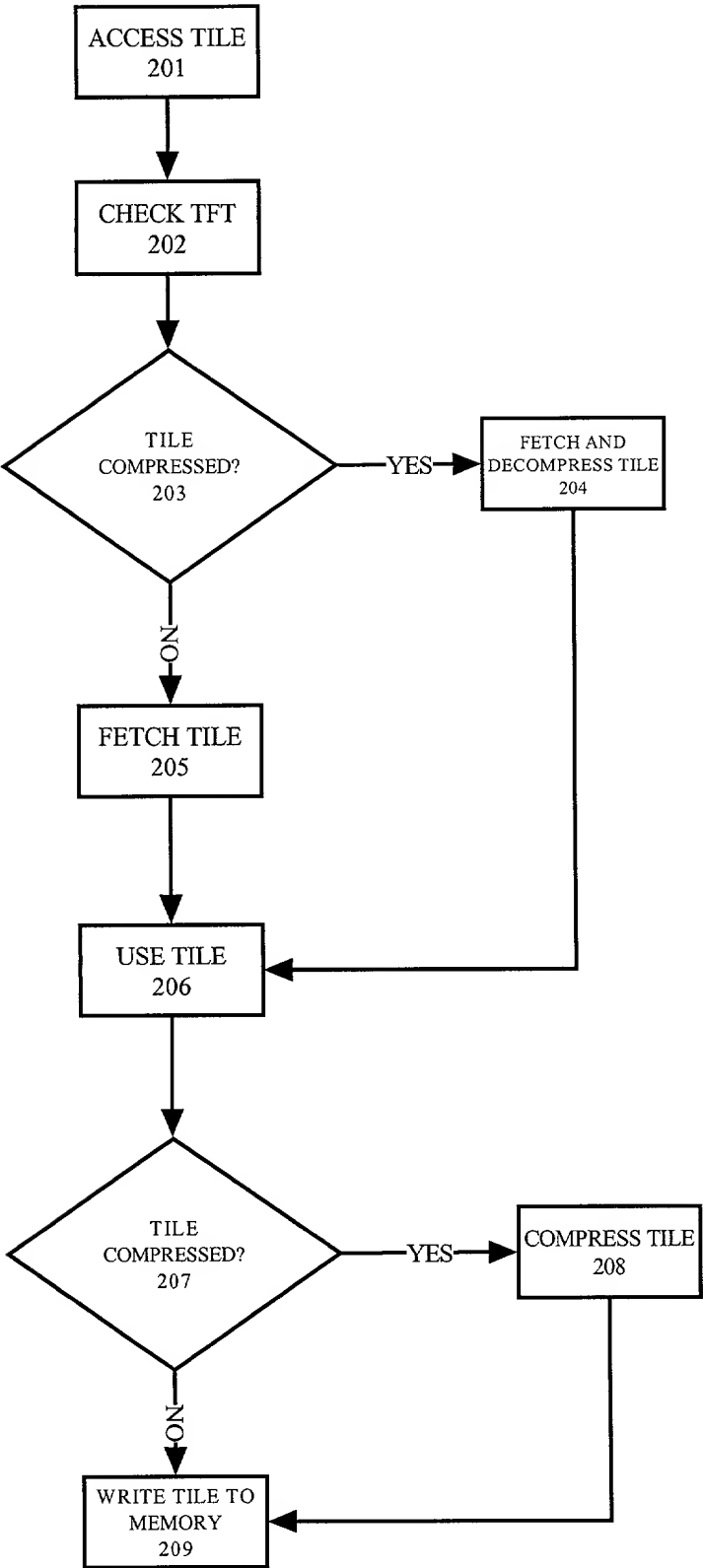


FIGURE 1

FIG. 2 is a flowchart illustrating a process for tile access and compression/decompression.

FIGURE 2



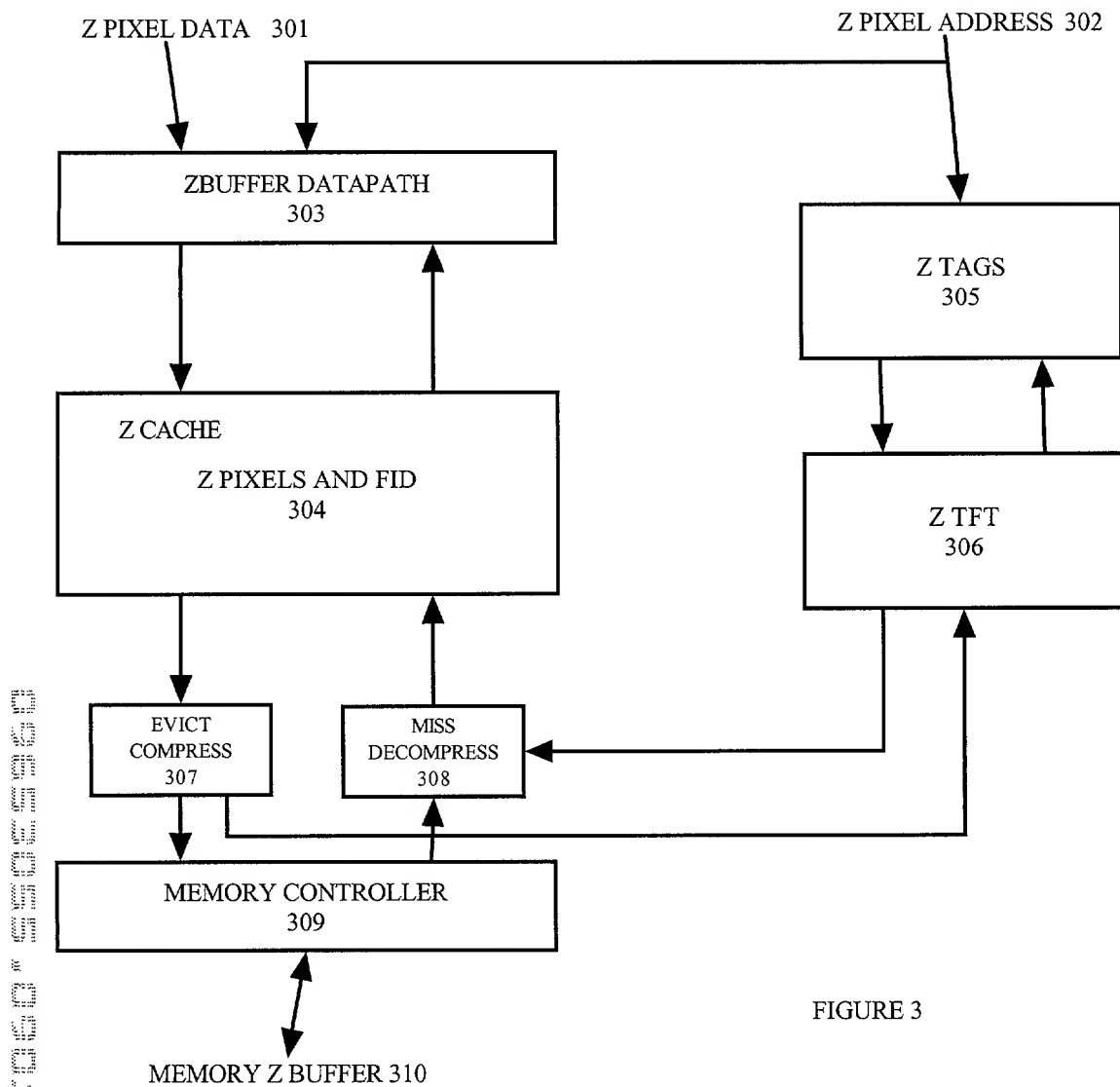


FIGURE 3

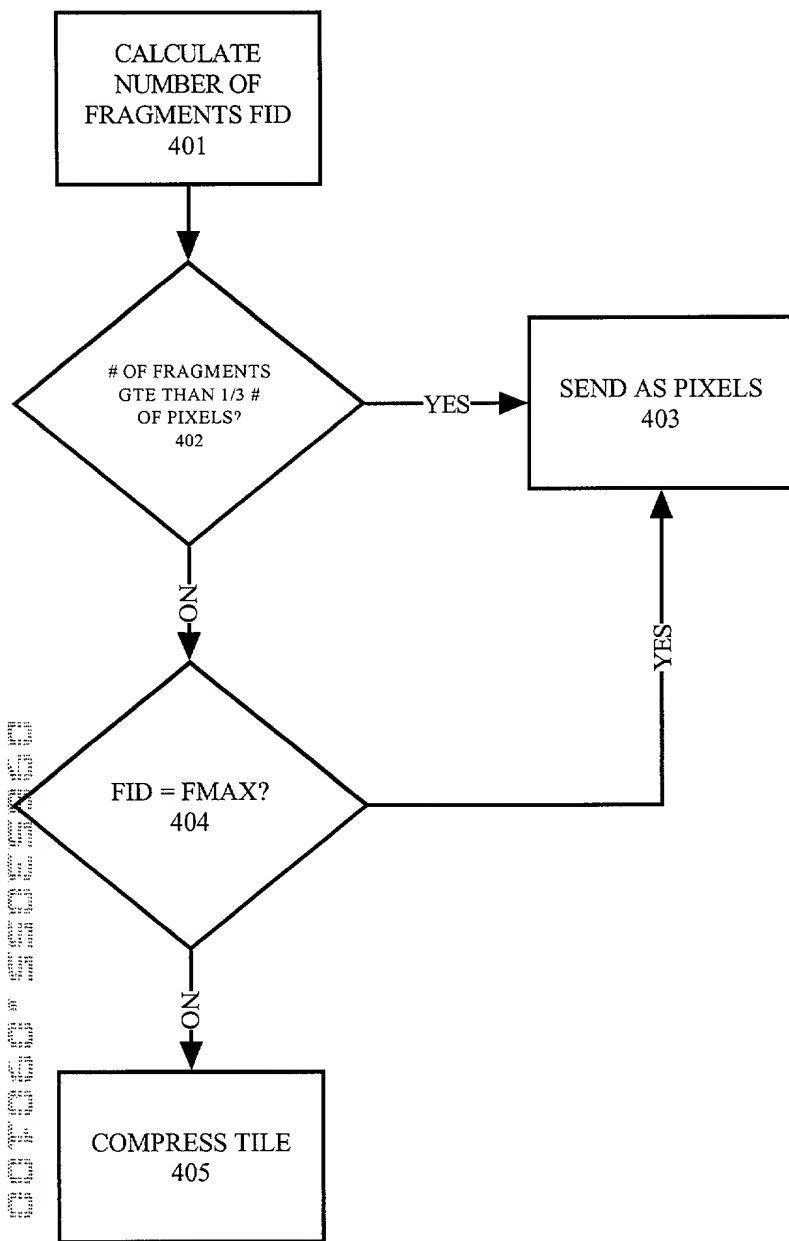


FIGURE 4

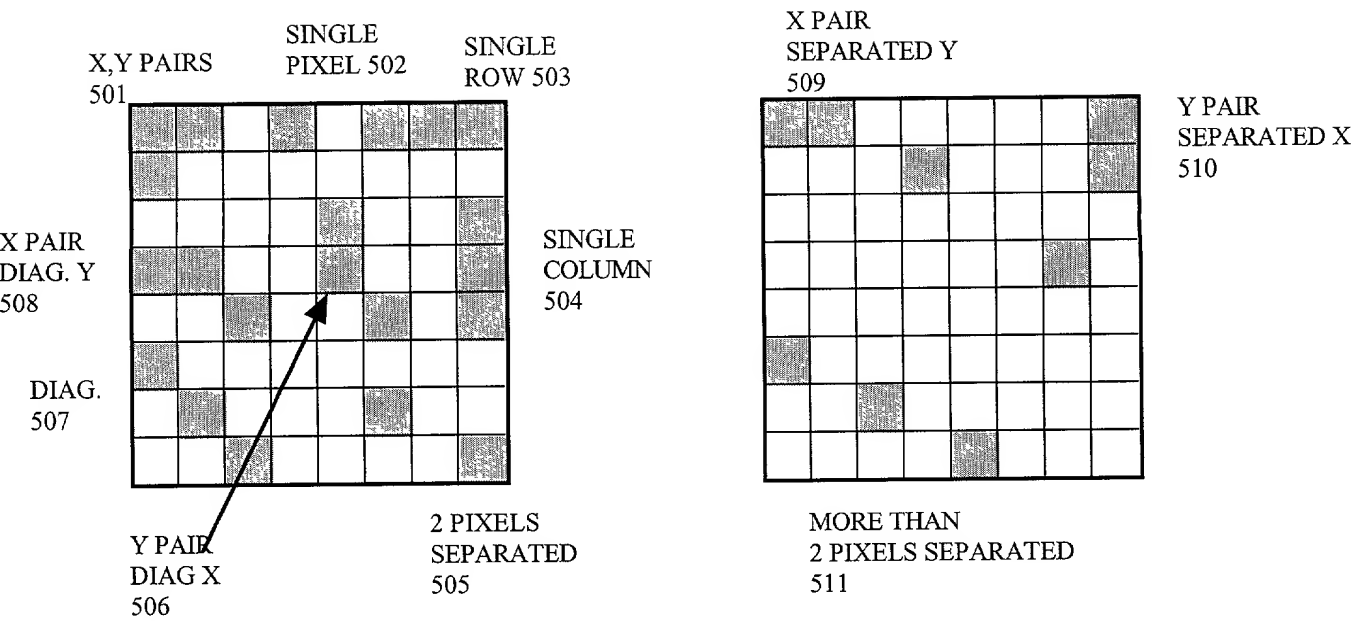


FIGURE 5

DECLARATION FOR PATENT APPLICATION

As below named inventors, we hereby declare that:

Our residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to our name.

We believe we are the original, first and sole inventors of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled: **"METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR COMPRESSION AND DECOMPRESSION OF Z DATA"**

the specification of which (check one)

- ☒ is attached hereto.
☐ was filed by an authorized person on my behalf on _____
 _____ as Application No. _____
 and was amended on _____
 (if applicable)

We hereby state that we have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims as amended by any amendment referred to above.

We acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56(a).

We hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, §119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and so identified, and we have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate on this invention filed by us or our legal representatives or assigns and having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Day/Month/Year</u> filed	Priority Claimed (Yes or No)
			No

We hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, §120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, §112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose material

information as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56(a) which occurred between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

Application Serial No.

Filing Date

Status


We hereby declare that all statements made herein of our own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under §1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

We hereby appoint Sally Daub, Reg. No. 41,478, and Couderc Brothers, a firm including J.D. Harriman II, Reg. No. 31,967, and Micah Goldsmith, Reg. No. 43,638, with full power of substitution and revocation, to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the United States Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith and request that all correspondence and telephone calls in respect to this application be directed to COUDERT BROTHERS, 333 South Hope Street, Suite 2300, Los Angeles, California 90071, Telephone No. (213) 229-2900, Customer No. 23600.

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